

REACHING OUT TOGETHER
40 Days of Community
Part 2
October 9-10, 2004
Rick Warren

"... you are standing together side by side with one strong purpose – to tell the Good News."
Ph. 1:27b (LB)

"You've been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ." Ph. 1:5 (NLT)

HOW CAN OUR SMALL GROUP "PARTNER"
TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS WITH OTHERS?

P _____

"Pray for us that God will give us an opportunity to tell people His message."
Col. 4:3 (NCV)

- ☐ Make a group prayer list.

A _____

"Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him. I do this to get the Gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ." 1 Cor. 9:22-23 (LB)

- ☐ Discover the common interests in your group.

R _____

"Because we loved you, we were happy to share not only God's Good News with you, but even our own lives." 1 Th. 2:8 (NCV)

"It is not my business to judge those who are not part of the church." 1 Cor. 5:12 (NCV)

"Whatever we do, it is certainly not for our own profit but because Christ's love controls us now." 2 Cor. 5:14 (LB)

- ☐ Ask God to give you a deeper love for others.

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T

“You are... God's instruments to do His work and speak out for Him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference He made for you.” 1 Peter 2:9 (Mes)

“Listen, and I'll tell you what God has done for me.” Ps. 66:16 (NCV)

- ☐ Write out your story & share it with your group

N

“Be friendly with everyone. Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people.” Rom. 12:16 (CEV)

“In his home Levi (Matthew) gave a big dinner party for Jesus. Many fellow tax collectors and other guests were also there.” Luke 5:29 (CEV)

“The Holy Spirit does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them.” 2 Tim. 1:7 (LB)

- ☐ Bring a friend to your group. Plan a party.

E

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Heb. 11:1 (NIV)

“When Jesus saw their faith, He said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’” Luke 5:20 (NIV)

- ☐ Never give up on anyone.

R

“Whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus.” Col. 3:17 (NLT)

“Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work. If you do, people who are not believers will respect you.” 1 Thes. 4:11-12a (NCV)

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During the next 40 days we're looking at two things. One is deepening the sense of community within our church family, reaching out to the community around our church family. Deepening the sense of love within our church family. Reaching out in love to the community around our church family. We're learning to build stronger relationships in our church and reach out in relationships of love to those around our church. The reason we're doing this is because the Bible says we're better together.

Last week I talked about how you were created for five purposes. But those five purposes that God has for your life cannot be fulfilled on your own. You have to have other people in your life. We are wired for relationships. God said, "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" God hates loneliness. So He wants us to be in community with each other.

You don't need a hundred friends but you do need three or four or five or six that are really there with you. The tragedy is most people today don't have a single intimate friend. They've got a lot of acquaintances but they don't have anybody looking out for their spiritual growth, who's helping them, who's saying I'm going to be there no matter what happens in your life. So we're going to be looking at how to deepen relationships. And why relationships go bad and how do you turn them around.

Last week we looked at, Why do we need each other? If you missed that message I'd encourage you to get the tape or CD. It's foundational for everything we're looking at the next six weeks. During the next six weeks we're looking at first, I'll be sharing six messages on deepening relationships so you can fulfill God's purposes. Then we're going to read this book 40 days of growing together – Better Together. A daily devotional. Then in our small groups we're looking at six videos and discussing on building stronger relationships.

Today we're going to start with the end. The last purpose of your life is, You were made for a mission. God wants you to share His love with other people – with your friends, with your family, with the people you work with – and show His love to those who don't know Christ yet. Who are not in His family.

Why does He want us to do that? Because God wants everybody in His family. God has never made a person He didn't love. God has never made a person He didn't have a purpose for. God has never made a person that Jesus Christ didn't die for. So God wants us to share that good news. But you're not alone. God wants you to do it with other people.

In the book of Philippians Paul says this. "*You are standing together, side by side with one strong purpose – to tell the Good News.*" Circle "standing together" and circle "telling the good news." That's what we're looking at today. How do we do it together? How do I share with my friends that God loves them? And how I do it in a partnership with other people? How do we do it together as a small group? Because we are to reach out together.

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The next verse of the same chapter says this “*You’ve been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ.*” Circle “partners.” We’re going to look at seven ways to partner with other believers, with other people in the family of God, to help reach your friends, your relatives, the people you care about most with the good news. We’re going to look at it in a little acrostic I spelled out PARTNER, How to partner to share God’s love.

Before you can do that though, you have to make a choice. You have to make the choice that I’m going to be unselfish. I’m going to start caring not just about my own life, but I’m going to start caring about other people’s lives. I’m going to care about telling them about the good news. That’s the choice. Will I choose to do the right thing? Will I choose to be loving? Will I choose to follow what God wants?

If you’re going to fulfill God’s purposes for your life you have to make the choice. The choice that says first, I’m going to choose to share the good news with other people.

During 40 Days of Community we have over 3000 small groups meeting all over Orange County. Over 3000! We want to hear your stories. Inside your program there’s a place for “Writing my 40 Days of Community story.” Anything that happens in your life or your group or your community we want to know about it. We’re already getting some reports in.

For instance we found out that a group of cast members in Disneyland are doing 40 Days of Community. I don’t know if Mickey’s involved, but Minnie’s definitely involved in 40 Days of Community.

I heard about a coffee shop that’s doing 40 Days of Community in the coffee shop for people with English as a second language. I’m not making this up!

I heard about a group that’s doing 40 Days of Community on a yacht in Newport harbor. That’s the one I’m going to go to! They’ve probably got little hors d’oeuvres with toothpicks in them. I like those things. I’m not making this up!

I know a group that’s actually doing 40 Days of Community as a group on Amtrak on the train going in to LA everyday, as they commute in together.

I actually know a car pool lane small group that’s got a mini van that has one of these drop down DVDs and they all watch it and discuss it going in to LA everyday in their car pool. Hopefully the driver isn’t watching but...

How do we use these groups, these 3000 groups to reach out and show love to our friends, to our family, to people we care about that we want so badly to know the love and grace and goodness of God? Here’s how you do it. You partner together. PARTNER.

P – Pray together

The first thing you do is you ask your small group to pray for your friends, for your friends who haven’t stepped across the line. Who are still considering the claims of Christ. Who don’t really know God in a personal way yet. You ask them to pray and you pray together. You can’t force anybody to love God. But you can pray for them. And prayer can do what God can do. Prayer

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can melt hard hearts. Prayer can warm up a cold heart. Prayer can activate and arouse an apathetic heart. And prayer can change a stubborn heart. I have seen it done thousands and thousands of times. Prayer can do whatever God can do.

People can reject your arguments. They may refuse to listen to your logic. But they are powerless against your prayers. It goes straight to their heart.

The cool thing about prayer is you can do it long distance. My wife right now is in the Philippines. She spoke in a church there this morning and in the afternoon she's meeting with the president of the Philippines. I can pray for her and send a prayer all the way across the ocean and boom! It goes straight to her heart. That is the power of prayer. When you pray together you say, These are the people I want you to pray about. God actually works.

What are we supposed to pray about as a group? One of the things in Colossians 3:4. The Bible says this *"Pray for us that God will give us the opportunity to tell people His message."* So we pray for God's opportunity to share with our friends and our loved ones and people we care about the great news about God.

As we pray for opportunity you know what happens? You start seeing them everywhere. Actually you've got lots of opportunities. They're all around you. You just don't notice them. Prayer makes me aware. When I start praying for my family then I start seeing the needs of my family. When I start praying for my friends, I start seeing the needs of my friends. When I start praying for my co-workers, I start getting concerned about my co-workers. It changes my heart, for one thing.

So here's the first action step in sharing the good news. Make a group prayer list then share it with each other. I want you to ask everybody in your small group, "Name one person that you would really like to know the Lord. They don't know the Lord yet. We'll all share those names. We'll make a list of six names or seven names or ten names or whatever. Then we'll start praying for each other's friends, each other's family." Everybody starts praying for people you know and love will begin to have a lot of people praying for them. There's power in that.

A – Appeal. Appeal to common interests.

Before you can share the good news with anybody you have to establish a relationship with them. Before you can reach them you must relate to them. You find out, What do we have in common? What do we like to talk about? Common experiences, common interests, common needs, common hurts. Do we like to fish, to golf, to cook, to shop, to sleep. Do we have kids? Are we interested in soccer or baseball or basketball or whatever?

Here at Saddleback church we have over 200 different ministries. People have different kinds of interests. One of our ministries alone – the recreation ministry – has reached hundreds of people for Jesus Christ with His love, simply by playing baseball with people or playing basketball or bowling or things like that.

So the second step, if you're getting your group to reach out, is to make a list of the things you have in common. You ought to talk with the people in your small group and say, "What do we like to do?" Make a list of all the things. Share it with each other. Then you ask, Who do we

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know who would also like to do that who isn't yet a believer? Who do we know who is not in the family of God but would enjoy going to an Angel game with us? Which of my co-workers or neighbors would like to do that?

I know of a group who are all San Diego Charger fans. They love football. What they did is everybody in the group bought a season ticket to the charger games. Then they all pitched in together and bought two more season tickets. Every time they'd go to a game they take two new people with them to the game. They go and have a good time at the football game. Then at the end they say, "Did you enjoy this? This same group meets on Thursday night over at Bob's house. Would you like to join us?" They're normal people. That'd be fun! So you just have fun with them.

I know a small group who likes to watch movie's together. This is different from their small group time. They just hang out. They do a thing called Master Wing Theater. Every other Friday night they get together on the Friday night and make hot wings and then they watch a movie together. They just have a good time.

That's finding common interests of people they'd like to do. So you pray together, you appeal to common interests...

R – Reach out in love.

Why? Because you have to have the right motive in reaching out to your neighbors and friends. Jesus said, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" You know the old cliché. People don't care what we know until they know we care. So everything we do is out of love.

Why are we doing this? Why are we even talking about reaching out to our community? Why don't we just focus on us? We've got enough people in our church. Who don't we just focus making the love in our church warmer and stronger. Why in the world should we focus on the community around our church. Why would we do that?

We certainly don't do it out of guilt. And we certainly don't do it out of pressure. And we don't do it out of duty. And we don't do it to make God like us because He already loves us. We don't do it because we're better than anybody else, because we're not. We do it for three reasons.

First, we have the greatest news in the world to share. If I had the cure for cancer I'd be shouting it in the streets. If I had the cure for AIDS I'd be telling everybody I could. But I've got something better than that. The key to purpose in life and eternal life. What is the good news anyway? It says we're to share the good news.

What is the good news? Here it is in a nutshell. The good news is this – you're not an accident. You were made by God and He has a purpose and plan for your life. You were made to last forever. God wants you to live forever with Him in eternity. But He wants you to get to know Him here on earth. He knows and loves everything about you and He wants you to know and love Him too. Jesus Christ came to earth so you could get to know what God is like. He died on the cross and paid for all your sins so that everything you've ever done wrong is completely

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wiped out and forgotten and forgiven. He gives you a purpose for living in the present. And He gives you a home in heaven in the future.

That's good news! Where else am I going to hear that kind of news? It's not like we're trying to give people rabies or something! This is the best news in the world. Everybody needs to hear it. So that's the first reason why we focus out on the community, not just on us.

The second is out of a heart of gratitude. If God never did another thing for me I still owe Him my life. Just for the fact that He's forgiven everything I've ever done wrong and He's given me the security of a home in heaven and a purpose for living now. He's helped me with so many problems in my life I owe Him everything. So I do it out of gratitude.

But then there's a third reason why we reach out. That's because the Bible says, "*God is love.*" When God comes into your life you start loving other people. In fact, I'll be real honest with you. If you don't love anybody else, you don't have God in your life. You don't! You may think you do but you don't. The Bible says in 1 John 4, "*God is love.*" And you can't have somebody as big as God come into your life and not change you. All of a sudden you start becoming less selfish and more loving.

If I didn't have Christ in my life I wouldn't be standing here. I was a very selfish person before Christ came into my life. I didn't care about anybody. All I cared about was me, myself and I – my needs, my interests, and the rest of you, forget you! But when God's love comes into your life you can't help but start to love other people. So we do it out of love.

The Bible says this, "*Because we loved you [that's the motive in reaching out in love] we were happy to share not only God's Good News but even our own lives.*" God says when you share with people who don't know Me yet, I don't want you to just share the good news; I want you to share your life with them. If you don't do both it's not really love.

You know what the problem is? Sadly today most people who don't know the Lord who are unbelievers, who haven't stepped cross the line, those people they expect Christians to reach out in judgment, not to reach out in love. There's this idea of "Christians." They think they're better than everybody else. They think they've got all the answers. They've got a higher standard of living. They put down everybody else. They look down their noses. They're just looking to judge everybody else." That's the common conception. Not the idea that we love people because Christ is in our lives.

What is sharing the good news? It's one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. That's it. I'm not any better than anybody else. We just pass it on. So they expect us to reach out in judgment and a lot of Christians are more known for what they're against than what they're for.

The Bible says this in 1 Corinthians "*It's not my business to judge those who are not a part of the church.*" Not my business! When my kids messed up when they were little I took care of that. When the kids next door, the neighbor's kids, I didn't handle that. Why? They're not my kids. Kids down the street mess up, they're not my kids. They're not in my family.

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So the Bible says we're to take care of each other in the family. If one of us gets off you should come and tell him, "You're getting off." But let me give you a little principle. Never expect an unbeliever to act like a believer until he is one. He or she can't. They don't have the power to change. There are a lot of things in my life I wanted to change before I invited Christ in. But I couldn't. There were some habits, some things I didn't like about myself. I could not change no matter how much I tried. I'd say I'm going to turn over a new leaf, make a new year's resolution, etc. I had no power to do it. That's why it's really kind of silly to try to make laws to make people act like Christians before they become Christians. It isn't going to happen. They can only do it with God's power in their life.

So when I see somebody who's not a believer acting in a way that's kind of foul or stupid or selfish or dumb I'm not out judging them. I'm called to love them and help them come to know Christ so then they can have the power to make the change. I just remember that's the way I was.

Here's the action step: Ask God to give you a deeper love for other people. Write this question on the bottom of your outline: How can I pray for you? One of the best ways that you could show love to a friend or to a family member or to a co-worker who is not a believer yet is to simply ask him, How can I pray for you? That's not offensive. Even people who are atheists don't mind you praying for them. They say sure, I can use all the help I can get. Everybody wants to be prayed for. Everybody. In fact, they're grateful for it. I've asked this question of tens of thousands of people. How can I pray for you? I've never had a single person in my entire life say, "Please don't! I don't need it. I don't want it." I've never had one person. Everybody wants to be prayed for. Just say, "Tell me what's going on in your life. What are you facing right now that I could pray and ask God for help in your life?"

This week, our church started during 40 Days of Community on a giant task that's never been attempted before. We are feeding all 35,000 homeless people in Orange County three meals a day for the 40 Days of Community. That took tons and tons of food. There's two ways you can be involved in this. One of them is you can give. [By the way, this week we got an anonymous half a million-dollar check for helping feed the homeless in Orange County.] Inside your program, there's an offering envelope. If you're a part of this church family and you want to help in feeding the 35,000 homeless you can help that way.

Or you can help deliver it. This week as we were delivering it to different places, not just people on the street, but a lot of homeless people end up living in these kind of run down hotels and motels where they live for two or three days or four days then they get kicked out. So as we began to deliver it to some of these homeless motels and hotels. We would deliver the food, we'd give them a Bible, we'd give them copy of The Purpose Driven Life and we would ask them, "How can we pray for you?" Many times those people would break into tears. They were actually more touched by the prayers than they were by the food. They said that somebody would care enough. Nobody's ever prayed for them in their entire life. Nobody in their entire life has said, "How can I pray for you?" They were deeply touched because we were reaching out in love.

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Tom:

There is a fourth way that you and I can partner together to let people know how great God's love is. That is...

T – Tell your stories.

Do what the Bible talks about in 1 Peter 2:9 “*You are God's instruments to do His work and to speak out for Him and to tell others of the night-and-day difference He has made for you.*” Tell your story. In fact, the most effective way to let other people know about the great things that God can do in their lives is to tell them the story of what God has done in your life. That is what makes a difference.

The great thing about telling stories is, you are the expert on your story. You may be an expert on some other things but there is one thing that all of us across this campus is a world expert on. That is your story. What God's done in your life. I've found over the years that people want to hear your story. What they don't want to hear is your *stooooory*. Fifteen minutes into the story and you're still five years old. That kind of story. People just want to hear the short story. We owe it to them to take a few minutes to think it through so you can tell the story of what God's done in two and three minutes not two and three hours. Tell the story.

Jesus said, “*You're to be My witnesses.*” That's a great picture. When I hear the word “witness,” I think of a courtroom. Most of us do. It's a perfect picture of what God's asking us to do to make a difference in the world. We're to be His witness. He doesn't ask us to be the attorney, arguing the case. He doesn't ask us to be the judge, judging other people. He says, I want you to be My witnesses.

What does a witness do? A witness just says, Here's what I've seen, here's what I heard. A witness just tells the story of what God's done in their life, to other people. I think a lot of us can think of a lot of different stories that we have, a lot of different things that God has done in our lives.

But one of the things we struggle with a little bit is how do I get into it? How do I start to tell the story in a natural way so it doesn't seem fake or phony? There is no one way. It depends on the circumstances. It depends on the situation. But we would like to give you a couple of pictures of how this could work in a natural way, as a part of everyday life. Our skit guys are going to come out and give us an example of some ways this could work. What's the best way of getting into telling your story? Two or three ways. One way is to listen for problems that Jesus has helped you with. When you find a problem that Jesus has helped you with, you use that to help other people. You can say God helped me with that, maybe He can help you too.

Hey, sorry I'm late.

How long have you been standing in this line?

I've been here so long that Pastor Tom's shirts are back in style!

Wow, that is a long time.

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I'm sorry I'm late. I've been having trouble getting out of the house. Having car pool with you barely motivated me.

That sounds serious. What's wrong?

I broke up with Janet last weekend. All I want to do is mope around the house, eat ice cream and watch movies on Lifetime.

I've been there. That's a horrible kind of pain.

How did you get over it?

Something changed in my life and made a really big difference.

What was it?

I started a personal relationship with Christ. Why don't we skip the coffee and we can go talk about it.

You can do that. Just listen for ways that God helped you. The truth is every one of us we have dozens of stories, maybe hundreds of stories of the things that God has done in our lives to make a difference.

There is another way you can do this. You can also sort of relate to a current event, something that's going on that everybody's facing. Maybe everybody's struggling with and you see in the newspaper or TV. So you relate to a problem in your life that somebody else has faced or a current event. Or there's another thing you can do. Sometimes there's someone, you've known them for a long time but you've never told them what God's done in your life. You know how you get to the point where you don't want to tell them because you never have told them and it's almost embarrassing. What do you do then? A great way to start then is an apology. Just apologize for never having said, "I've never told you the most important thing in my life, my relationship with God, with Jesus Christ."

Friends don't keep good news from other friends. You tell them the good news of what God has done in your life.

Here's an action step with this. It's a simple action step. Write out your story and share it with your group. Start there. Start with your group. With the people that you know that are close to you. Some of you have never even shared the story about what God has done in your life with someone in your group. So in your group, during 40 Days of Community, here's what you do. Each week have somebody share their story as part of your group. Just take two or three minutes to do that. Or maybe one night you pair up and everybody tells their story on the same night. But some way during 40 Days of Community everybody gets a chance to tell their story.

The Bible says in Psalm 66:16 "*Listen and I'll tell you what God has done for me.*" Do that. First of all with each other. Then I'd encourage you, maybe at the end of 40 Days of Community

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have a party and invite a bunch of people from the community over, other friends that you have. And everybody tell your story that night. Just let everybody tell their story. Tell them, We want to try this out on you and you can give us your feedback.” Something like that.

It’s interesting. As you hear several people tell their story not just you, there is power in a group witness. When I can hear the story from a lot of people it makes the story even more powerful.

Rick:

The fifth way to help other people experience God’s love is...

5. To nurture friendships.

Just build friendships with them so you can build a bridge between your heart and theirs and Jesus Christ can walk across. This step takes a little bit more time and effort. It takes a little more energy to build a friendship. You don’t just do it overnight. But the Bible says in Romans 12 *“Be friendly with everybody. Don’t be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people.”*

I said earlier, very few people have a true friend in life. Everybody’s looking for a true friend. I’m not talking about acquaintances. Everybody’s got acquaintances. I’m talking about people who are there with you when you need them most. Who do you build those friendships with? The people who are already in your life. They’re the people you work with and you go to school with, you live with. They’re down the street, the people on the speed dial on your phone. They’re all around you. As I said, God has put these people in your life specifically so you can share the good news with them. If not you, who? You are the only Bible some people will ever read. You represent Jesus Christ to them.

One of the best ways to build a friendship is a biblical method that I love – *have a party!* Did you know that much of Jesus’ ministry was done at parties? Read the gospels, read His life. You’ll read that He often did ministry at parties. In fact He was such a party animal that the religious leaders of that day, the Pharisees, called Him a glutton and a drunk. They called Jesus a glutton and a drunk because He was always at parties. Why? Because that’s where the people were that He wanted to share the love of God with.

He even taught His disciples to do this. One of His disciples named Levi (not the jean guy but another guy!) whose name was also Matthew *“In his home Levi, also called Matthew, gave a big dinner party for Jesus and many fellow tax collectors and other guests were also here.”* Why does it say, many fellow tax collectors? Because that’s what Matthew was. He was a tax collector. He called up the office and all of his buddies and said, Come on over. He had an office party for Jesus.

Some of you can do it right there at the office. You can get a laptop and put the DVDs on of 40 Days of Community at lunchtime. Everybody’s got to eat anyway. You might just start a group at work in your lunchroom.

Here we’re talking though about a party. I would encourage you to have a Matthew’s Party. What’s a Matthew’s Party? No agenda but fun. You just bring some people over who don’t

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know the Lord and who you want to get acquainted with and build friendship and show love to. A lot of you guys have barbecues in your backyard. If they're portable, I want to challenge you to move it to the front yard sometime. Start cooking out front and you'll get a crowd. The smell will start wafting down the cul-de-sac. They'll start to show up. Get people together for Monday night football or something like that. 1 Timothy 3:2 says that one of the qualifications of being a pastor is you have to enjoy having people in your home. I do because I'm a party animal.

God says I want you to reach out to people and nurture friendships. Christians tend to fall into one of two extremes. Either imitation or isolation. Isolation or imitation. On the one hand some Christians become isolationists. They say, "I don't want to get polluted by the world. I don't want to get dirtied by the world. I don't want to get my life messed up. I'm just going to isolate myself. I'll build a wall and I'll build my own little culture. We'll have our church culture and our school culture and our family culture. We're not going to let anybody out in the world get in because we don't want to get dirtied by *those* people."

Those people are the people that Jesus Christ died for, friend. Isolation doesn't work where you just build your own little culture and you stand far away from the world. How are you going to build any friendships that way? That's wrong.

The other extreme is imitation which says, Let's just be just like the world. We'll dress like Britney Spears. We'll trash talk like Britney Spears. We'll say whatever we want. We have the same values, the same goals. We'll be no different from the world.

That's not what God wants you to be either. Where you just give in, give in to the lowest common denominators of society. That's not it either.

The answer is not isolation, let's just stay away from everybody who's not a believer. And it's not imitation – let's just act like everybody else.

The answer is not isolation or imitation it's insulation. Insulation and infiltration. The Bible says you're to be salt and light in the world. You're to penetrate the world with the goodness of God.

Let me give you an example. After this service if I go out to lunch at a seafood restaurant and I order sea bass. When they bring it to me the first thing I'm going to have to do before I can eat it is I have to put salt on it to eat it. Think about this. That fish has lived its entire life in salt water. Yet, I have to put salt on it. What's going on? That fish is insulated. If God can take a fish and keep it in brine, in salt water, its entire life and not have it infiltrate and pollute the fish then certainly God can take you or me or any believer and put us in the world and keep us from being corrupted by the wrong values.

Does that make sense? So you are to be in the world but not of the world. The Bible says this *"The Holy Spirit does not want you to be afraid of people but to be wise and to be strong and to love them and enjoy being with them."* So you nurture friendships.

Here's your action step. Bring a friend to your group. During 40 Days bring somebody who is not yet a follower of Christ. Maybe they're considering it. Maybe they're not even considering

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it. But you just like them. Invite them to your group. You say, I don't have any friends who'd like to come to my Bible study group! Are you kidding? I don't know if you saw the recent Gallup Poll. He took a survey and found thirty four million Americans said "I'd go to church but I've just never been asked." Thirty four million! Some of those people you work with. Some of them live on your block. They're far more willing to come to a small group than you're willing to ask them. But you nurture friendships. You think of a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker you care about and invite them to church, invite them to your group. Plan a party. Have a good time. Build relationships.

Listen to this story of Jeff and how his group reached out in love.

About three years ago we joined a small group and it was a group of like minded people that really wanted to reach out to others who didn't know Christ yet. It was through that group that we were introduced to a couple that had just experienced the tragic loss of their son. They agreed to meet with us over the summer. We had several meetings where we had challenged them to look through some material that answered and addressed the major claims of faith in God. We went through a couple things. One was Operation Timothy, introduction to the basic beliefs of Christianity. The Case for Christ, the book by Lee Strobel was a great book to consider the claims of Christ.

It was through that time studying the book, The Case for Christ that we found out that Cathy had given her life to Christ in a service that Lee Strobel was speaking at. We were able to confirm her salvation at that time at our kitchen table. She had prayed several times in church and didn't know if it'd stuck or not. It was interesting for us to just confirm to her that she truly was saved at that point. She looked at Chris, her husband and said, "Have you prayed that prayer?" He said, "No, I haven't." He had some tougher questions.

I invited Chris to coffee. We'd been through The Case for Faith and all the intellectual questions that had all been addressed. I just challenged him. I asked him if he was still struggling with the intellectual questions. He said at that point he could reconcile in his heart all those questions. He didn't have it all figured out. But he knew that those weren't barriers any more. At that point he was really struggling. I remember asking, "What would prevent you today from trusting your life to Christ?" He sat silent for a couple minutes. It was an incredible thing to see God drawing him to Himself. Finally, I just asked, "Chris, do you want to pray and ask Christ to be your Savior?" He looked at me and said, "Yes!"

To me that was so humbling to be able to see God work right in my presence. I led him in a prayer that confirmed him in accepting Christ as his personal savior. It was a great moment. I immediately called everyone in our small group. We'd all been praying for them for two years. Chris specifically for the last six months, that he would give his life to Christ. The cheering that went on in our small group was incredible. We know there was a great party that day in heaven. More importantly, Chris had accepted Christ.

Jeff said, We'd been praying for this friend of ours for two years. They never gave up hope. They kept expecting God. This is the sixth way to help your friends come to know Christ.

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6. Expect God to act.

I don't know if you realize this but God works in people's hearts when we expect Him to do so. The Bible says, *"According to your faith it will be done unto you."*

The greatest pastor of the nineteenth century was a guy named Charles Spurgeon. He was the pastor of the largest church in the world at that time in London, England. He'd often speak to about ten thousand people. Many people came to know Christ through his life. One day a young man came to him and said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I don't understand it. Whenever you talk to people about the Lord they always tend to open up their lives. They tend to accept Christ. When I talk to people about the Lord nobody's interested. Nobody comes to Christ. What's wrong?" Spurgeon said, "Young man, you don't expect people to come to Jesus Christ every time you talk about Him, do you?" He said, "Of course not." Spurgeon said, "That's your problem."

I don't know how it works, I really don't. But I do know this. God has a will for your life and the devil has a will for your life and you have a free will to choose. Every moment of your life you're choosing either God's will or the devil's will for your life. When you choose your own will it's certainly not God's. So you're going in the wrong direction. I don't know how it works but I do know that when I pray and expect people and pray for people, what happens is it makes it easier for them to choose the right way. God will never force anybody to choose Him but it makes it easier.

That's why when I'm backstage before each service I pray, "God, it'd be a waste of time to go out there and talk to those people without expecting You to do something. So I'm going to thank You in advance that You're going to change lives. Thank You in advance. I expect it to happen in faith. Not because of who I am but because of who You are." That is the faith that God uses in changing lives.

Very few people come to Jesus Christ the first time they hear the good news. They've got to think about it. That's why I said we never push anybody. We never pressure anybody here. Take the time to make the right decision. I believe if a person is intellectually honest they'll make the right decision over time if they consider all the facts. So we say take the time and we let them consider it.

I think about how long Leslie Strobel prayed for Lee Strobel before he became a believer. She never gave up. She expected God to act. Look how God is using Lee today.

One of the ladies in our church decided to be a 40 Day host and host a small group. She'd been inviting her dad to church for fifteen years. Every time he turned her down saying, "No, I'm not interested." He just kept turning her down. Then she invited him and said, "I'm hosting a 40 day group. Would you like to come to that?" He said, "Sure! I'll come. You're leading it. I'd love to come to that." You never know when a person's going to open up.

Here's the point. Never give up on anybody. You never get discouraged. Nobody's hopeless. You trust God. The Bible says this in Hebrews 11:1 *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* Some of you, you've been praying for some time for your boyfriend to become believer, or your girlfriend to become believer. Or you've been praying for your husband or your wife or your parent or child or somebody you care about, a relative, a

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worker, a good close friend. You've been praying for them and you don't see any evidence that two years later they're any closer in their journey to God that they were two years ago. You just don't see any difference. What do you need to do? You need to start praying in faith expecting God to act. Faith is certain of what we do not see. "God, I don't see them warming up to You at all, in any area of their life. But I'm going to pray and expect that You're working in their life even when I can't see it."

Again, I don't know how this works. You know the story in the Bible of the four guys who had a friend who was paralyzed. He needed to be healed. They believed Jesus could heal him. They put him on a mat and they take him to Jesus. When they get there they set him down and Jesus says this in the next verse. "*When Jesus saw their faith, He said 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'*" And He healed the guy. Notice: He healed the guy on the basis of the friends' faith not the guy who was sick. The guy who was sick didn't necessarily have any faith. But it was his friends. Jesus looked at these four guys and said, "You believed I would do it so I'm going to do it." Sometimes you have to believe in faith for other people. And you expect God to act.

Let me let you in on a little secret. It doesn't take a lot of faith. It just takes a little faith. You don't need a lot of faith in life. You just need a little faith. But if you put a little faith in a big God you're going to get big results. It's not the size of your faith that matters, it's the size of your God. You take a little faith and say, "God I believe You're going to work in my friend's life and You're going to bring them to You." You keep believing and believing. Anybody can do these steps. Even a child can do these steps. Pray for people, appeal to common interest, reach out in love.

A couple years ago at about ten years of age, Lauren realized a need in her life. She realized she wanted to go to church and looked us up on the Internet and came to church. She became a believer and started praying for her parents. Now her parents and family are in the family of God. They're actually serving here. I want you to hear her story. Would you give a warm welcome to Lauren:

Lauren: I'll be sharing my testimony with you. I'm twelve years old and have been attending Saddleback church for almost five years. I've recently moved to Fountain Valley and attend Saddleback every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday.

I can remember what it felt like before I asked Jesus Christ to be the boss of my life. My life felt incomplete. Since I hadn't grown up in the spiritual atmosphere I'd never had a Christ centered life. One day on a dark night I had a family crisis. My brother Jack almost died. At that point in my life I knew it was a sign, a sign that I needed someone. Something to have but I wasn't sure what. After many months of searching I found my answer. I needed to go to church. It was a month before Christmas and I remember writing my Christmas list for Santa. I remember my mom asking what was the first thing on my list. She asked, Is it expensive? No. Hard to get? No. Then what is it? I want to go to church. My mother seemed startled. She had known that I wanted to go to church but not that bad. The next thing I knew I had a certificate that read, You get to go to the church of your choosing and attend as long as your mother allows. The next day I got up and looked it up on the computer and found Saddleback church. I knew it was the church for me. I thought someone or something was urging me to go to this church. But I didn't know why. After attending Saddleback for almost a year and attending Breakout I knew what I needed to do.

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It was around 7:30 and we were asked to pray a prayer that would change our lives forever and I did. Then the next year, 2002, I was baptized on March 17th by Pastor Craig.

What does it mean to me to have Jesus in my life? What Jesus means to me now, there are no words to describe something so great. My father got sick in 2000. He was sick for over two years. After many hard days of him being sick and very depressed he became an alcoholic. My mother took my brother and I to my grandparents' house. My dad was becoming more depressed. But with the help of others and a lot of prayer time with Jesus he's getting better. But I remember this. Tough times make you stronger. As I'm constantly referring to Psalm 119:14 that reads *"I rejoice in Your decrees as much as in riches."* That's basically saying to me, I love what You have given me, O Lord. Keep blessing me all the time.

To me Jesus is a factor needed in everyone's life. After asking Jesus into my life I changed in many ways. I felt complete, knowing I was in good hands and going to heaven. The emptiness I felt earlier, that was completely gone. I became more considerate, loving, caring. An overall better person. I grew spiritually. My family now attends Saddleback church and grows spiritually everyday. My family thanks me for leading us to Jesus and without the help of Jesus we'd never have gotten through my dad's or my brother's crisis. But I reply, "I did it for Jesus and He did it through me." I now attend and serve at the church along with my family. My dad and I work at the 9:00 am church service and attend every weekend. I recently graduated from Breakout last June and now attend my new C group. I have friendships and support groups in my small group that have been able to get me through the last two years that were really rough. I had a great time in June on the mission trip to Mexico where I was able to serve Jesus even more.

Here are a few words that describe Jesus to me: comfort, acceptance, safety, forgiveness, hope, happiness, love, reassurance, and always knowing I have a place in someone's heart. As I said earlier, Jesus is a factor. A factor that no one should be without. I also have now learned that every tough time makes you stronger. There's nothing more fun or important to me throughout than coming to church and knowing I'm serving God. I continue to pray and hope that my brother and my dad are completely healed. I also hope that I grow spiritually. I have now found one of my life long dreams. I now hope to be a pastor and teacher. I hope that you have learned that no one should be without that main factor in his or her life. I urge you to take the prayer and ask Jesus into your life. Thank you.

I got to thinking... If Lauren married one of my boys she'd be Lauren Warren. As I listened to Lauren speaking was thinking of that verse where Jesus said, *"Unless you become as a child you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* What in the world did He mean by that? He meant that we must love Jesus Christ with child like simplicity and sincerity. Simple sincerity. We must trust God and trust Jesus with simple faith. And we must share Jesus with simple enthusiasm. That's what it's all about.

Here's the last way to help bring your friends to know the Lord.

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R – Represent Christ with your life.

The Bible says, *“Whatever you do or say let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus.”* Whatever you do or say. We need audiovisual Christians who walk the walk and talk the talk. They do it and they say it. They live it and they share it. They communicate it and they demonstrate it. They are show and tell Christians. You need both. You need to live it in your life and you need to share it with your mouth.

The Bible is very specific about this. 1 Thessalonians 4 *“Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business. Do your own work. If you do people who are not believers will respect you.”*

The fact is God specifically put people in your life and you are God’s representative to them. If not you, who? God put you there, why would He put two there. He put you there to share with your relatives, your loved one, your friend, your co-worker. How will the people know unless we tell them? Your friends who need the Lord, who need to be shown how to get to heaven, God isn’t going to write it in the sky for them. He’s not going to send them a telegram. He has sent you. He’s sent you to tell your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your family, whoever. He’s sent you.

You’ve heard me say before, the most dangerous prayer you could pray is two words: Use me. I dare you to pray it. I dare you to pray it during the next forty days. “God, use me! Use me to show Your love to people who don’t know You love them. Use me to show Your purpose to people who don’t know that You have a purpose for their life.” God has given this church a heart to change the world. We intend to change the world with the love of God. But it starts in our own community, in our own small groups with those around us who we know and we love. They’re not going to know unless we show them.

So here’s my challenge to you. If you’re in small group – if you’re not you need to get in one this week. If you’re in a small group make sure that at least one person in your group is still on the journey, that they haven’t stepped across the line yet. Make sure there’s somebody in your group who’s got some questions, who’s a seeker, who’s going, “Sounds good. Sounds logical. I need to check it out a little bit more. I’m interested in this Christian life thing but I need to know more. I need to know.” Fine! This is the place. This is the church to be if you’ve got questions. Make sure there’s somebody like that who’s a friend of yours is in the group. Then together take these seven steps of love and pray in faith that God will use your partnership to reach one more for Jesus in the next 40 days.

Imagine if every group in our church had the privilege of helping one person step cross the line. At the end of 40 days there would be 3000 more people headed for heaven than there are right now. You can be a part of that.

Prayer:

Father, You have given us a mission in the world to share Your good news and Your love with other people. Thank You that we don’t have to do it alone. Thank You that right now as we share You’re going to give us Your words and Your love for others. I pray that You would raise up an army with a heart to change the world.

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Now you pray. Say Dear God, I realize that You've put specific people in my life because You want me to share Your love with them. Today I accept my mission. I want You to use me. Help me to be concerned about people around me who don't know You. Help me to take these seven steps of partnering with my small group. I realize that they're not going to know unless we show them. Help me to remember that no one is hopeless. And nobody is beyond reach of Your love. And that people who I think are so far from You really Your love is still farther and can reach out to them. So in faith I ask You to help our group reach one more for Jesus during the next 40 days. In Your name we pray. Amen.